

Bourbeuse River Angler Guide

Bourbeuse River game fish commonly sought by anglers are **smallmouth bass**, **largemouth bass**, **channel catfish**, **flathead catfish**, **rock bass**, and panfish. A cool-water fish, the **walleye**, is also found in the river in reaches below the dam at Noser Mill.

Black bass, which include smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, and the spotted bass, have been extensively studied in the river especially in reaches below Highway 185 (Noser Mill). The daily limit for black bass in streams is six. **Smallmouth bass** are common with a good portion of fish greater than 12 inches, the minimum length for the harvest of black bass. Large smallmouth bass prefer deep water with some current, in particular next to cover such as boulders, logs, or bedrock. Smallmouth bass prefer temperatures from 60E F to no more than 80E F. This species feeds optimally at 70-75E F.

Smallmouth Bass Fishing Tips

Smallmouth bass can be caught on a variety of artificial lures such as spinner baits, jig and plastic grub combinations, crankbaits, and plastic worms. The Bourbeuse tends to be cloudy, so lures that are easily seen should be selected. Live bait such as crayfish, earthworms, minnows, and insect larvae is often very productive.

Largemouth bass are a sporting alternative to smallmouth bass. **Largemouth bass** are often the largest bass species present in the Bourbeuse River in most pools greater than 3 feet in depth. Also, **spotted bass** have become increasingly common in the Bourbeuse in recent years.

Largemouth bass and spotted bass can tolerate slightly warmer temperatures and turbidity than smallmouth bass.

Largemouth Bass Fishing Tips

Largemouth bass prefer more woody habitats, sluggish weedy backwater areas, and slightly warmer waters. They can be caught on baits similar to those used for smallmouth bass. Spotted bass tend to prefer the main channel zone, but angling techniques effective for smallmouth and largemouth bass also work on spotted bass.

Channel catfish weighing three-plus pounds are a fairly common catch. Bourbeuse River catfish anglers pursue both channel and **flathead catfish**, but channel catfish are the most sought-after fish. Moderate fishing pressure does occur for both species using pole and line as well as trotlines and limb lines.

Catfish Fishing Tips

Channel catfish are bottom feeders. Look for them in habitat containing current, deep pools, and cover such as downed trees. Your bait should be on or near bottom to attract attention. Although fish will take live bait such as minnows, frogs, earthworms, or sunfish, they are attracted to anything with strong scent such as rotting meat or bloody chicken livers. There are a number of effective prepared baits on the market. Fishing trotlines, limb lines, and bank lines at night are the most popular methods of angling for channel catfish. A trotline consists of a stout line stretched for several yards into the stream with short lines or "stagings" tied every 3 feet for baited hooks. A swivel is used on the short line to prevent fish from tangling the line. Weighted ends of the main line are lowered to the depths wanted. Unlike the channel catfish, **flathead catfish** prefer live bait or freshly killed baits. Use large minnows, goldfish, green sunfish, or bullheads. In the Bourbeuse River, catfish can be taken throughout the year. Daily limit is ten (10) channel catfish and five (5) flathead catfish. There is no length limit on catfish species taken from the Bourbeuse River.

Redhorse and **suckers** are very abundant in Ozark streams. For every 100 pounds of fish in a stream, more than 50 pounds are suckers. Suckers may be taken by a variety of fishing methods including pole and line, gigging, snaring, snagging, and grabbing.

Sucker Fishing Tips

Now limited to a cooler part of the year, gigging has long been an Ozark tradition. Nongame fish may be taken by the gig method in the Bourbeuse River between sunrise and midnight from September 15 to January 31. While the majority of suckers are taken by giggers in the fall and winter, other fishing methods can be used. From March 15 to May 15, anglers are permitted to snag or snare suckers and redhorse shoaling on riffles. To catch suckers and redhorse all year, anglers use small hooks baited with mussels (clams) or nightcrawlers that are drifted into riffles. If suckers and redhorse are taken by pole and line, the daily limit is 50 in aggregate. If they are taken by gigging, snagging, snaring, or grabbing, the daily limit is 20 in the aggregate.

Walleye and **sauger** have been caught by anglers, however most are caught by those fishing for other species, especially black bass. While population sampling during walleye spring spawning, biologists routinely capture walleye exceeding 18 inches total length. Although walleye growth is exceptional, population density is low. Walleye can be found in deep pools during the day and feeding in the shallow margins of the river at night. From February 20 to April 14, walleye and sauger may be taken and possessed from 0630-1830 CST. Sauger are more abundant and can be caught below the Missouri Department of Conservation Uhlemeyer Public Access at the I-44 Bridge.

Walleye/Sauger Fishing Tips

Walleye and **sauger** can be caught on similar baits. Having a preference for live baits, walleye will strike minnows, earthworms, and leeches. Fishing crankbaits and deep-running plugs in deep pools is an effective summer strategy. Because walleye are active at night, try baits that reflect the available light and produce some sound. Spring fishing strategies should include fishing bridge abutments and rock piles that are walleye and sauger magnets. Jigs and minnow combinations can also be trolled in large pool areas with bridge abutments.

Rock bass, a favorite for the frying pan, can be fished with similar gear and techniques as the smallmouth bass. Fisheries Biologist Mike Smith says, "**Rock bass** can be found throughout the basin. However, they do not represent a significant component of our fish samples, except in the lower river especially near Union." **Rock bass**, regionally known as goggle eye, earn their name from their preference for rocky areas along a streambank that has some current. The rock bass has no size limit and has a daily limit of fifteen.

Other panfish include the **longear sunfish, bluegill, black crappie, and white crappie**. Panfish are plentiful and are often accessible from the streambank. Tiny jigs with a grub attached work well for longear sunfish and bluegill (see table below for other lures). A float rig is often the most effective method of fishing for panfish. Suspend your bait by float about half the depth of the water you are fishing. Move your rig periodically until you find fish.

Baits to Use

Species	Baits	Lures
Catfish species	worms, minnows, crawfish, stinkbaits, cheese, liver	occasionally on jigging spoons or crankbaits
Black bass species	crayfish, minnows, worms	jigs, spinnerbaits, crankbaits, artificial worms
Walleye	minnows, leeches, nightcrawlers	jigs, crankbaits, jigging spoons
Panfish and Rock bass	worms, grubs, leeches, small minnows, crickets, grasshoppers	tiny jigs, in-line spinner, small spoons, small spinner bait